

## **FORCED LABOR A GROWING PROBLEM WORLDWIDE, U.S. OFFICIALS SAY**

**By Jane Morse  
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**WASHINGTON, JULY 25 --** Trafficking in persons for labor may not attract as much publicity as trafficking in persons for sex, but it is a huge problem nonetheless, officials say.

"There is a growing movement of trafficking for labor," according to Mark Taylor, the senior coordinator for the State Department's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons. He estimated the global value of trafficked labor at \$9.5 billion.

Taylor spoke July 19 at the State Department during a three-day conference called "Defending the Defenders," designed for government and nongovernmental organization personnel dealing with issues on democracy, human rights and labor.

"Foreign governments have improved their efforts to combat sex trafficking," Taylor said. But too often, labor trafficking is an administrative offense not subject to criminal investigations."

Moreover, what constitutes forced labor is not defined very well in many countries, he said, and there are often few, if any, protections for the victims.

"Sponsorship laws give employers inordinate power over employees," Taylor said. Employers often seize the passports and other identification, as well as plane tickets, of trafficked employees. And it is difficult to define involuntary confinement, even when employees are given few or no days off from work, he said.

Bonded labor, too, is increasing, Taylor said. He cited cases where migrants pledged as much as \$20,000 for jobs, an amount they could not possibly pay off during their two-year contracts.

"Destination countries have much to do in giving migrant workers rights," Taylor said. "Source countries also must take basic responsibility for their citizens."

### **GLOBALIZATION'S DARK SIDE**

"Globalization is creating a widening wealth gap," said Neha Misra, the global coordinator for counter trafficking programs at the Solidarity Center for the AFL-CIO, the largest federation of labor unions in the United States, at the State Department conference. According to Misra, globalization has not provided enough jobs in many countries and is forcing workers to migrate for work.

There are an estimated 120 million migrant workers worldwide, Misra said, and most typically are employed at dirty and dangerous jobs. Often they become part of “an informal economy” in which they are not allowed to organize, are not advised of their rights and too often are abused and exploited, she said.

Nishra Varia, senior researcher at the Women’s Rights Division for Human Rights Watch, told conference participants that while there are positive aspects to migration, migrant workers too frequently have neither human rights’ guarantees nor social safety nets.

#### **MONITORING GLOBAL TRAFFICKING**

In its 2006 Trafficking in Persons Report, the State Department acknowledged that “governments of destination countries for migrant workers have a special obligation to ensure that those workers are not subjected to servitude.”

But it also said “research is showing that source countries permit or encourage some exploitative practices that either place migrant workers in involuntary servitude before they leave for work abroad, or place them in unfair debts that are precursors to involuntary servitude in the destination country.” The report called for source countries to provide a “safety net” of consular officers, legal aid and access to shelters for workers that find themselves in involuntary servitude.

In fiscal year 2006, the United States contributed more than \$74 million abroad to fund 154 international anti-trafficking projects in 70 countries.

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